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ABSTRACT

To be competitive in the job market, speech communication students should have courses in technical subjects and business administration. A focused master's level speech communication education can prepare students for two career paths: public relations management (with emphasis on campaign design and corporate communication beyond the required entry-level writing skills) and personnel development. Those who seek upward mobility in public relations and corporate communication need sophisticated campaign design strategies, an understanding of federal and state regulations, archival and survey research skills, and an understanding of corporate operation. Those who seek upward mobility in personnel development and training must have the ability and knowledge to set policy and guidelines for development programs. In addition to these aforementioned skills, graduate students should understand and acquire management principles. Communication programs in general, and speech communication programs in particular, have been reactionary, following industry rather than being at the cutting edge. To increase the employability of graduate students, the speech communication program must take into consideration the educational needs of those employed in public relations and personnel development. (HOD)

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ARE WE TEACHING THE RIGHT THING?
WHAT THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY THINKS AND EXPECTS

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In 1976, I addressed the question which is before this panel today. To do so, I surveyed personnel directors of several of Houston's major corporations and businesses to determine their impressions of the types of positions for which speech communication majors were employable. From the data generated, I made several observations which have guided the development of undergraduate and graduate curriculum at the University of Houston.

The results of the survey were reported in an article in the Association for Communication Administration Bulletin.[1] As I was preparing today's presentation, I reread that article to see whether I agreed with the observations six years later. I was pleased to see how well the generalizations have survived; but I wish I had emphasized even more the career opportunities in public relations[2] and personnel development.[3]

One of the generalizations I made in that paper was that to be competitive speech communication students should have courses in technical subjects and business administration. What I envisioned at the time was the speech communication major going into technical sales. To date, I am unaware of any one of our students who has done that, although such sales positions exist. Our majors who enter sales typically take product placement jobs.

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What I am even more convinced of, however, is that our majors should have coursework in business administration. This is more true than it was in 1976 and is more important for the graduate student than for the undergraduate. Compared with business administration majors, communication majors are competitive for marketing jobs when the emphasis is not on market research; they are highly competitive for personnel development (organizational development (OD) and training and development (T&D)) jobs. This is especially true of speech communication graduate students, particularly when presentation or "training" skills are involved. What they lack in the credibility of their major and in course content, they make up by having superior teaching, facilitation, intervention, and communication skills. Moreover, communication skills are basic to most training and development programs. Business administration students, as well as those from the social sciences, are typically better prepared in statistics and measurement. As companies increasingly begin to measure the effectiveness of their training and development programs, research skills will become ever more important for personnel development people, and our majors will need those skills to be competitive.

A second observation upon which I reflected was that coursework in technical areas, in business administration, and social sciences was valuable, but that little of career value was to be learned in the humanities and fine arts. In retrospect, I make three changes in that observation. (1) Our students need as much training in writing as they can get; in this regard, carefully selected English and journalism courses are essential. (2) For those interested in public relations or advertising,

familiarity with photography and graphics is helpful. (3) For those interested in issue management or advocacy advertising, history and philosophy courses which discuss the history and ethics of business practices can be valuable.

The mainstays of undergraduate education are a solid foundation in communication theory, persuasion, interpersonal and organization communication, message design and delivery skills, and the ability to analyze issues and conduct issue research. Courses in mass communication, especially writing, are essential. The need for empirical research (particularly survey and measurement) and writing skills is paramount.[4] An undergraduate curriculum emphasis in training and development, as a parallel to or substitute for, speech teacher education looks promising. This course of study should emphasize instructional design, methods for achieving behavior change, and presentational skills, including design of sophisticated audio-visual aids.

The remainder of my comments will be focused on masters level speech communication education. I will be particularly interested in two career paths. These are public relations management (with special emphasis on campaign design and corporate communication beyond the required entry-level writing skills) and personnel development; both hold employment opportunity for speech communication majors. My observations are based upon many conversations with students seeking jobs, with those who found jobs, with working professionals in public relations and personnel training, and with corporate employees. Moreover, a number of nation-wide statistics help us forecast the employment market.

The comments made in this paper are aimed primarily for terminal masters degrees designed to prepare students for upward mobility in personnel development and public relations, including corporate communication. We must look toward a future in which the computer and other communication technology have implications for public relations and personnel development experts. These technologies expand the possibilities for disseminating information and achieving training and development. They also pose problems of being accepted by employees and for gathering, accessing, and managing information.

Public Relations--Corporate Communication

Those who seek upward mobility in public relations and corporate communication need sophisticated campaign design strategies, an understanding of federal and state regulations, archival and survey research skills, and an understanding of corporate operation.

In a recent issue of Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, Trent and Trent observe that speech communication students were competitive for public relations jobs because they were trained in programs which approach "communication as a transactional system," ones with a "long history of interest and research in persuasion," and ones with "a variety of social science research methodologies."[5] In addition to writing skills, archive and survey research methods, and the ability to analyze issues and evidence, graduate students should understand and acquire management principles and skills.

With optimism for the continued growth of jobs, the International Association of Business Communicators estimates that

over 350,000 men and women are employed in company communication worldwide.[6] Positions in corporate communication and public relations are projected to at least keep pace with most other jobs. These positions should increase about 8.2 percent per year which, for public relations, constitutes an annual growth of 6-7,000 jobs.[7] The future is bright because of the amounts of money being spent: Issues management or advocacy advertisement, $1 billion per year; public relations, $10 billion per year; and product and service advertisement, $53 billion per year. Technical writing positions should increase at a similar rate.[8] Most of the people in these positions are trained in journalism or English. The advantage speech communication students have for mobility is their understanding of persuasion, audience analysis, and assessment of campaign effectiveness. Nevertheless, graduate students must hone their composition skills by writing public relations campaign proposals and by practicing writing formats required for public relations.

Communication programs in general and speech communication programs in particular have been reactionary following industry rather than being at the cutting edge. To increase the employability of our graduate students, we must take strides to produce innovative campaign designs, to help form federal and state policy related to public relations activities, and to use the new technologies.

Several areas of education, which are going to be essential for the education of public relations professionals, are worth considering here.

1. We have found that public relations people are often not considered credibile sources of information and advice for the formation for communication policy, goals, and activities. This is particularly true for formulating corporate communication goals or for analyzing the communication implications of management decisions. Public relations experts must be able to understand, help achieve, and contribute to corporate communication goals. They must have solid insight into and be qualified to give advice about the communication implications of corporate activities. These experts must be able to convince management of the value of communicating constantly with the public.

2. Public relations professionals must understand the role and design of the following kinds of corporate communication. Internal-employee communication is designed to keep employees abreast of corporate happenings and to make them feel part of the company. Particulary because of the leadership of Mobil, advocacy advertising or issue management campaigns are becoming more important; as a part of corporate image campaigns, they are designed to take a position of social, economic, or political issues. Crisis management is often thought of as the lot of the public relations expert; although crises occur and require immediate and skillful handling, they are only a small part of public relations activity. To lay a foundation for crisis management, companies are beginning to recognize the need for continually providing information about their operation, their operating requirements, and the rationale for their activities. Thus, ongoing communication is a means for moving toward the transparent corporation whereby the public has the opportunity to

understand corporate behavior and requirements. Often financial communication, including annual reports, is a responsibility of public relations. Too often those who are managing public relations are not sophisticated enough in accounting and management procedures to have much credibility in the development of financial statements. Consequently, these publications often are written by management and financial experts who fail to communicate effectively.

3. Public relations experts must understand staffing requirements. They must have the ability to determine the kinds and mix of individuals required to create an effective public relations unit. They must have the management skills necessary to achieve productivity in their units.

4. Research is becoming increasingly essential for public relations experts. They must be able to survey public opinion, audit employee opinions toward the company, and track and assess the effectiveness of campaigns. Public relations professionals are becoming increasingly convinced that their effectiveness can be measured and can be subjected to standards of cost-effectiveness. In addition, they must be able to use archival and interviewing research techniques to ferret out facts about their company's technology and management performance.

5. The new communication technologies offer some interesting challenges and opportunities for the public relations expert.

a. Many corporations are becoming sophisticated in the development of information management systems. Public relations experts must be able to access and understand this information.

b. Data retrieval systems offer tremendous opportunities for achieving short response time to inquiries by reporters and the public. Public relations experts should become educated in the design of such systems so that they can influence decisions regarding what kinds of information are stored and how they can be retrieved. Innovation is underway. For instance, consulting organizations are developing computer-assisted data and clipping services. Some companies have created a system whereby press releases issued at one location can be stored in the computer and later accessed at that location or at some other location many miles away.

c. Public relations experts are often isolated from managerial or technical experts. New technologies make it possible for them to communicate rapidly to receive vital technical or managerial advice and to obtain approval of the written products of this advice. Electronic mail is one means for being able to communicate with others in the company on very short notice; this capability is particularly important when several people must approve written text which must be sent out quickly but which requires approval by individuals miles apart.

d. Computer-assisted text writing, editing, and typesetting is becoming prevalent. Such capabilities range from word processing systems to computer systems.

e. With the capabilities of data search, some companies may eventually make themselves more available to the public. In the future, a stockholder may be able to use a home computer to reach into the company and access selected data files. Or, data

files may be available for reporters who can access them with their own computers.

f. Television networks throughout companies are becoming standard means for providing information to employees.

7. Especially in the design of lobbying and advocacy advertising campaigns, public relations experts must understand relevant federal and state policies and regulations. The Federal Trade Commission has regulatory powers over the content of certain kinds of image and advocacy advertising. Some issue ads are not tax deductible according to Internal Revenue Service quidelines. The Federal Communications Commission sets policy which affect corporations' access to electronic media. Some states prohibit grass roots lobbying. Looked at from another perspective, public relations experts may need to participate in the development of campaigns aimed at opposing or supporting legislation. To do so, the expert needs the appropriate research skills and an understanding of public policy.

Personnel Development and Training

Those who seek upward mobility in personnel development and training must have the ability and knowledge to set policy and guideliness for development programs. Those who enter personnel development will need an understanding of various new communication technologies. Although set back by the recession, personnel development jobs should recover and keep pace with or exceed employment growth in general. This is especially true if training and development programs have a positive effect on productivity.

1. Personnel development experts must have research, particularly measurement, skills and understand the scope, purpose, and methods of organizational change and development.

a. To be able to set development policy, development experts must be able to keep current on research which often requires the ability to understand statistical methods.

b. Based upon this research and management goals of the particular corporation, development experts must be able to build training and development models which take into account the best current research, management philosophy, change strategies, leverage points for change, and criteria for assessing the effectiveness of their programs.

c. Development specialists need to be able to perform a variety of research tasks such as readiness assessment, communication audits, and evaluation of the success of development efforts.

d. Development experts must be aware of the federal and state requirements which relate to work performance. Some of this information may play a role in the design of training programs. For instance, requirements for terminating employees could be a valuable part of programs on employee appraisal. Or, guidelines relating to sexual harrassment are important to managerial and supervisory development.

2. As is the case for public relations experts, new communication technologies pose opportunities and challenges.

a. One of the biggest problems with the innovation of technology is achieving its acceptance. Invariably some socio-technical adjustment is necessary, and often it meets

resistance from employees. Additionally, research can be performed to determine the best ways of introducing the new technologies and for assessing the impact of new technologies on employee communication needs.

b. Development experts may be asked to assist efforts to determine whether the new technologies increase productivity.

c. In the analysis of such effectiveness, development specialists must have insight into cost-benefit analysis. Such standards should be central to the total corporate training effort, but managed in ways which guide the long-term commitment to personnel development.

d. Training by television and computer is becoming increasingly possible. Rather than bringing employees together or taking them away from work locations, the new technologies can facilitate "long distance" training. They allow self-paced instruction.

e. Development experts should be prepared to assist in understanding the communication impact of the design, selection, and placement of communication system hardware and software.

Conclusions

If speech communication curriculum--especially at the graduate level--is going to produce competitive graduates, it must meet a number of challenges in the next years. The challenges are obvious, and meeting them should be exciting. And no apparent reason precludes speech communication education from being a vital part of that exciting future.

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